

The End Of The Circle

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A simple one shot about Sasuke and his choices.

Status: complete

Published: 2013-05-26

Words: 1765

Rated: Fiction T - Language: English - Genre: Tragedy - Characters: Sasuke U. - Reviews: 47 - Favs: 113 - Follows: 42

Original source: <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/9328235/1/The-End-Of-The-Circle>

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[Introduction](#)

[The End Of The Circle](#)

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The war was over.

Madara had been defeated. Akatsuki was completely destroyed and the great threat was over.

The victory had come at a heavy cost. Thousands of brave ninja had died, including Shukaku, Inoichi, and Neji. There was an uncertain peace now. No one wanted to return to how things used to be, yet people were unsure of just what they wanted for the future. The threat of total annihilation had forced all the ninja villages into a grand alliance. There was talk about maintaining the united front, and making Naruto its official leader.

They were calling the position Prime Minister.

Uchiha Sasuke glanced over to where Naruto was and smirked. Naruto had Tsunade on one side and Gaara on the other. They were both talking to him as he strolled with his hands behind his head. Sasuke had seen that on countless long walks to and from missions. It meant Naruto was bored and probably day dreaming about having ramen or something. Looking at him all Sasuke could see was the same loud mouthed idiot he'd known since he was a kid.

Yet Naruto was the great hero of the war. He had saved countless lives by selflessly using his chakra to shield ninja from every village. He had been the one to bring down Madara, and when the fighting was over it had been *his* name everyone had cheered. It was obvious who Tsunade would choose to succeed her. And if the Kages really did agree to make their Alliance permanent Naruto was the only one they would all agree to follow.

Sasuke shook his head. Even though he'd seen it all at first hand it didn't seem possible. Naruto heading home cloaked in glory, while he was in chains.

At the end of the battle Orochimaru had died. The Kages, as well as all the others summoned by edo tensei, had disintegrated and returned to death. He, Karin, Jugo, and Suigetsu had immediately been placed under arrest. Sasuke had manacles clapped on his wrists and ankles connected by iron chains. He and the others were making the slow trek back to Konoha. Since he was in the midst of six thousand Leaf ninja, and had surrendered willingly, they weren't bothering to closely guard him.

"You don't need to worry Sasuke-kun." Sakura was at his side. She had been pretty much since the moment he had returned. As if afraid he might suddenly disappear again.

"I am not worried Sakura."

She continued as if not hearing him. "Tsunade-sensei had to arrest you or else one of the other Kages would have. The Raikage definitely would have if she hadn't acted first. I am definitely sure that sensei will understand your situation and take into account how you came back to help us." Sakura's eyes darted up ahead to Tsunade and then back to him. "She might have to punish you, just for appearance sake, but it will just be a slap on the wrist. You will definitely be safer in Konoha than anywhere else."

Sasuke gave a weary sigh. His chains clinking merrily with every step. "You don't understand Sakura."

She looked at him fearfully. Just as with Naruto, when he looked at her all he saw was the girl always desperate for his attention and so very desperate to please. There was no doubt that she had grown into a strong ninja since their school days. But in some ways she was still the clingy little fangirl she had always been.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I didn't come back because it was the safest choice or even the best choice. I came back because I decided the village was important to me."

Sakura nodded eagerly. "Of course! You wanted to help your friends!"

"No. It wasn't for my friends. It was for the village itself. I decided that what Konoha stood for was worth saving."

Sakura stared at him, it was clear from her expression that she didn't quite understand. "Well, I still think that's great Sasuke-kun."

She never likes to admit that she doesn't know exactly what I mean . Sasuke thought. Despite all the things she had tried to do for him he felt the old familiar annoyance with her begin to stir. Back in the academy she had never understood him. She had invented some ideal version of what he was and had tried to please that person, instead of going through the trouble of trying to understand the real him. She would just keep repeating the same behavior over and over and over again, always refusing to learn from her failures.

Just before he had abandoned the village, she had begun to change a little. She had still not understood his pain, but at least she had realized he was *in* pain. And for that, he had thanked her.

Now she had reverted back to what she had been in the academy.

He continued walking, not really wanting to talk any more. He respected her as a ninja and as a medic nin, and was grateful to her for her loyalty to him and to Team Seven. But that was all he felt. He knew from past experience though that there was no point in telling her so.

"Everything will definitely be all right once we are back in the village." Sakura said. "I know everyone will be happy to see you again."

Will they? Sasuke glanced about at some of the faces surrounding him.

Kiba was clearly unhappy and had made no effort at all to hide it.

Shikamaru's face was a blank façade. It was hard to believe the lazy idiot he had known in school had been the strategist for the entire alliance army. Yet everyone from Tsunade on down acknowledged his genius. Unlike Kiba and some others, Shika had not been overly emotional, but he had stated clearly that Sasuke was a traitor and could never be trusted again.

Even Ino had sent him uncertain glances. She was not openly hostile, but was clearly unsure of what to make of him.

Many of the older ninja that he had not known personally scowled at him. It was obvious that in their eyes he was a traitor first and an Uchiha only after that. Given all the things he had done he couldn't even blame them for that. A ninja's greatest virtue was loyalty, and he had betrayed the village not once but twice. He had joined its two greatest enemies, all for the sake of power and revenge.

As he walked along he thought about some other powerful ninja who had also acted for those reasons; Orochimaru, Pein, Madara, and Obito. Each of them had possessed great power and ability. What had they accomplished in the end? Had any of them made the world a better place? Now that they were all dead would any of them be missed? Their names would go down in the history books, but they would be reviled and hated. For all their great talents these men had only brought death and destruction to the world.

He compared them to the Hokages. Each of the five had sacrificed themselves for the sake of Konoha. Rather than fulfill their own selfish desires they had done what they felt was best for the greater good. Their decisions had not always been the right ones; but the village was their legacy, and each one was beloved and remembered with honor.

What will they say about me?

Now that there was time he was trying to look at himself and his actions honestly. Power and revenge, power and revenge, those had been his guiding principles since the day he decided to abandon the

village. He had killed, or helped cause the death of, Itachi, Danzou, and Orochimaru. He had gained tremendous power and even activated the ultimate form of the sharingan. Not too many years ago that would have seemed like plenty.

But had anything he'd done actually made the world a better place?

No. If he was going to be honest with himself the answer was no. All the sacrifices he had made, all the efforts, had been for completely selfish goals. And while he had not brought the level of ruin that an Orochimaru or Madara had, nothing he had done had ever benefited anyone but himself.

Sasuke looked back at Naruto, who still had two Kages pestering him. He was the one who had made the world better. Because he had values friends and the lives of others above his own personal desires. In other words, Naruto was the one who had been acting like a true Hokage all this time.

So which of us was really the idiot?

"It's over."

"What?" Sakura asked nervously.

Sasuke turned to her. "Everything is over. I am done with revenge or trying to acquire more power. I think I finally understand now what matters. From this point on I am going to try and be the sort of ninja I should have been from the start."

Sakura smiled at him. "Yeah."

It was then that an albino with a soulless smile walked up to the two of them.

"Hello Sasuke-kun."

Before either he or Sakura could react Sai produced a kunai and stabbed Sasuke in the chest.

There was an instant of stunned shock by him and everyone else around them. In the next moment four ninja had Sai on the ground, he made no effort to resist. Sakura had both hands on his chest and was performing a medical jutsu. (He was lying on the ground without recalling a fall.) Naruto and Tsunade were suddenly there as well. He wasn't feeling any pain from the stab wound, instead his whole body was starting to feel cold.

"Something is wrong!" Sakura shouted. "Sensei please help me!"

"You will not be able to save him." Sai said calmly. "The kunai was coated in a special fast acting poison that you are not familiar with."

"Why?" Naruto screamed.

"For Danzou-sama." Sai said. "To honor everything Danzou-sama did for me I could not allow his murderer to live."

Tsunade was kneeling beside Sakura with her hands on him as well. The grim look on her face told Sasuke all he needed to know.

Staring up at Naruto, Sasuke managed to actually smile. "You're going to be a great Hokage Naruto."

The look of shock on the blonde's face made him want to laugh.

Things began to get dark and all the shouts and noises faded away.

Until there was only the darkness and silence.